TALKING BOOKS

Donald W. Aldous.

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Talking Books

By DONALD W. ALDOUS, A. M. Inst. E.

MANKIND is prone to many ailments, some minor and some major, and amongst the latter afflictions must be included blindness and deafness.

These harrowing words are intended as a preface to a description of a recent development, namely, *Talking Books for the Blind.* The reader may now be wondering why deafness has been mentioned. Admittedly it is not wholly relevant, but the writer wishes to stimulate thought on a question that until lately was not considered to merit it. This is the point: do we fully, or even partly, realize what it means to be totally, or so-called stone-deaf? Indeed, one may go so far as to ask which is the greater disability — complete blindness or total deafness, or are they not equal evils? Most people, without meditation, answer dogmatically that the loss of sight is the greater and overwhelming calamity. But, reflect a moment and try to comprehend what the loss of the hearing faculty really implies. Never to hear beautiful voices, exquisite music, or any of the other pleasant sounds (natural or reproduced) which, to the deaf, are mere wasted air-vibrations. Of course, to preserve a sense of balance we can contemplate the advantage not being susceptible to unwanted sound, i. e., noise, an urgent modern problem. But that is another story!

To return to the theme proper — what is a *Talking Book?* Briefly, ten double-sided 12-inch gramophone discs, each side with a playing-time of about 25 minutes. Thus a book lasting over eight hours can be reproduced at will by the blind person; this, obviously, being the equivalent of having an ordinary book read aloud. The pioneer experiments in this work were carried out by the *American Foundation for the Blind*, and, in England, this innovation has been made a practical proposition by the work of a committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Ian Fraser, the well-known blind M. P., and appointed by the *National Institute for the Blind*, and *St. Dunstan's.*

It will be readily appreciated that many technical obstacles had to be surmounted to produce satisfactory long-playing records. At the outset it was realized that a compromise was inevitable, and that the aim would have to be the reproduction of speech that could be understood without aural strain or fatigue, and not necessarily a faithful reproduction of the original voice. The committee also had to take into account such matters as cost of production, distribution and reproduction, portability, and, of course, the peculiar needs of the blind listener. It should be remembered that about 75 per cent of the blind population cannot read Braille, or if at all, only slowly.

These were some of the conflicting problems requiring solution, and after two years' research the committee has achieved success. It was suggested that a modified talking-film method would have been the best system, but, at present, its disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Ultimately, the choice was made of using a slow-speed lateral-cut record, actually a constant angular velocity of 24 revolutions per minute, cutting 200 grooves to the inch, and a reduction in the amplitude of the recorded low frequencies. These special discs are being produced in America by the *R. C. A. Manufacturing Co.*, and in England by H. M. V. (*The Gramophone Company, Ltd.*)

There are three types of reproducing equipment available, all of which use Garrard turntables, capable of revolving at 24 and 78 r. p. m. (1) Electrically driven motor and amplifier, feeding a loudspeaker. (2) Spring motor, piezo-electric (Rochelle salt crystal) pick-up and headphones. (3) Mechanical reproducer, i. e., spring motor, sound box and external horn. A library of "record books" is in process of compilation, and diverse subjects will be recorded in an attempt to satisfy all tastes. The above apparatus is purchasable at cost price, and

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For the First Tim

HEAR HIGHER FIDELITY RECORDS *on a* HIGHER FIDELITY ELECTROLA

The sensational new RCA Victor phonograph, model R-99, marks an epoch in the history of recorded music. It is as significant in the art of phonograph building as the new improved **Victor Higher Fidelity** process of recording. It provides the means of reproducing — not an approximation, nor yet an imitation — but an actual DUPLICATION of ALL the music etched in the grooves of a record.

The R-99 embodies many new and interesting features which set it far above any phonograph at any time or at any price. Here are some of the improvements which make this marvelous Electrola the most convincing musical instrument of its kind.

It has a frequency range one-third greater than any instrument previously developed — truly the first **Higher Fidelity Electrola** in history. Its **Dynamic Amplifier,** another great improvement, invests the instrument with an almost uncanny power to reproduce a climax building crescendo, or to reduce the tone volume to the most whispering diminuendo—in short, it reveals in fullest glory certain phases of recorded sound which, due to the limitations of reproducing instruments, have never before been detected.

It has an entirely new amplifier and a 12-inch aluminum-coil speaker which, combined, produce an output of 15 watts and defeat any possibility of distortion. Best of all is the revolutionary tone control which even when reduced to its lowest level maintains an even balance that does not alter the quality or shading of tone.

Another feature—and one which will be of great interest to the ardent record collector—is the newly-developed "Featherweight Pickup" which reduces surface noises to the minimum and prolongs the life of records indefinitely.

Until you have actually **heard** the R-99 you can scarcely comprehend the superiority of this astounding instrument. Compare its performance with your own phonograph. Listen to a favorite passage such as the tremendous climax in the **Ride of the Valkyries** on side 2 of set M-248, or to the tender **rubato** of the woodwinds in the Toscanini recording of the **Siegfried Idyll.** You have only to hear such beloved passages to appreciate the unquestionable eloquence with which Victor's R-99 delivers the world's greatest music by the world's greatest artists through the medium of the world's most perfect reproducing instrument.

RCA Victor

Of special interest to the radio audience is Columbia's practice of presenting informal interpretations of each program for the nationwide radio audience by eminent musical authorities. In recent seasons, during the broadcast intermissions, Columbia has brought to the microphone such critics as Lawrence Gilman of the New York Herald Tribune; Olin Downes of the New York Times; Pitts Sanborn of the New York World-Telegram, and Leonard Liebling of the Musical Courier.

. . . .

Season after season the response to the Philharmonic-Symphony Society's broadcasts has grown in volume and extent. Generally speaking, the Society's directors have found that the largest portion of the radio public was in favor of having little but the classic masterpieces; that a considerable body of subscribers, particularly of the younger generation, wished to hear the most important works of contemporary composers, and that a small but growing group of radio listeners demanded an opportunity to know what America is producing musically. Accordingly, the Philharmonic-Symphony's broadcasting schedules in forthcoming seasons over the Columbia network are planned to coordinate and fuse these various elements into a balanced record for the radio audience, offering the best of the past and the most significant music of the present day.

A NEW TIME FOR NBC MUSIC APPRECIATION HOUR

The nation's school children will hear the NBC Music Appreciation Hour, conducted by Walter Damrosch, at a new hour next fall, when the program inaugurates its ninth consecutive season of weekly broadcasts.

As a result of an extensive survey conducted by National Broadcasting Company during the past year, and prompted by thousands of requests to place the programs at a more convenient hour for schools in various parts of the country, a new time schedule has been arranged for the series. During the coming season, beginning on Friday, October 2, the Music Appreciation Hour will be heard over both Red and Blue networks from 2:00 to 3:00 p. m., EST, instead of 11:00 a. m., EST, the old schedule.

As in the past years, the Instructor's Manual and the Student's Notebooks will be available to schools and the general public at the cost of production and distribution. The Manual, a general guide to teachers, prepared by Dr. Damrosch and Lawrence Abbott, will contain explanatory notes, thematic illustrations and biographical information on all four series of concerts.

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the "books" are loaned free to the blind. Other interesting features are the record labels in Braille, and the interchangeability with American talking books.

In the future there is a possibility of a *Talking or Speaking Newspaper for the Blind*, recorded either on discs, or on a sound-on-firm or on-paper method. It must be stated that none of these facilities is granted to people with sight.

EDITORIAL

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the road to which it is very evident engineers have not successfully paved or smoothed out so that one's enjoyment of these things would be either consistent or worthwhile. But these technical men are capable of many things, and they have had hidden up their sleeves before this the iron that successfully smoothes out the ruffles and breaks in things, so who can say — maybe this television is closer than we believe. However, experts we have talked to have admitted to us that it is still two to five years away before it will be practical or truly enjoyable. And even then, it is not certain that a machine for successful reception can be purchased at a price which the many can afford. The outfits utilized in the recent test all cost we understand over $500.00.

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ACCORDING to statistics published in New York newspapers, radio advertising went down for every two cents in 1934 to one cent in 1935 in several mediums of advertising, and record sales went from every one cent in 1934 to two cents in 1935, and from the indication of figures to date it looks as though it may reach and exceed three cents in 1936. In the Metropolitan area alone, we are told, over 2500 sets of Toscanini's Wagner Album were sold. Which only goes to prove that people are becoming more discriminate about the music they hear in their homes. We have shouted far and wide the advantages of a record library, particularly when radio palls. We hope our readers will take up and carry on that shout — after all every one that does it is shouting for something that is personal and far more selective. A record library in every home — take up the slogan.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Peter Hugh Reed,
American Music Lover,
12 East 22nd Street,
New York City
My dear Mr. Reed:

I understand that there is a possibility that Columbia may bring out Tovey's *Conjectural Ending* of the *Art of Fugue* recently released in England.

It seems to me that from an artistic point of view to end the Roth Quartet version with a piano solo will be a great mistake. Such a change of medium in the middle of an artwork is to me unthinkable!

I have written Columbia to that effect, but a barrage from *The American Music Lover* would be much more effective. To make a transcription of

pany which introduced such a galaxy of international celebrities was founded in Milan by Dr. Michaelis, *Phonotype* is a Neapolitan concern and can boast very few artists of note, chief of whom by far is FERNANDO DE LUCIA.

Since his name was an inevitability sooner or later, it is just as well to have its appearance now. The art perpetuated by De Lucia on literally hundreds of discs is that most calculated to convince the cynic of the value of collecting old vocal records. Be you for it or against it, you must admit that nothing exists quite like it today. There may be tenors with more luscious vocal outpourings but none with the haunting velvety quality sustained throughout the florid cadenzas of *Ecco ridente in cielo* from *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* (Phonotype Nos. 1943/44). There may be instances of genuine versatility but nothing comparable to that displayed by a man who could sing impeccably the above aria and yet be entrusted with the creation of Canio in *I Pagliacci* both here (Dec. 11, 1893) and in London (May 19, 1893) under the supervision of the composer (the *Vesti la giubba* is coupled with a duet from *L'Africana* on *Phonotype* No. 2560 and the *No, Pagliaccio non son* with the *Seranata d' Arlecchino* on No. 2561).

Yet it is not these characteristics as much as his unique creative imagination which endears De Lucia to all lovers of artistic vocalization. For if he transforms everything he sings with a celestial brand of the "swing music" idea, he does so at all times with feeling for the musical and intellectual dramatic significance. He infuses the composition with that "expressiveness" so abhorrent in absolute music and yet so necessary to lift operatic interpretations out of the commonplace. He is the perfect sentimentalist as revealed in his superb *cantilena* when singing the arias from Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, the *Tra voi belle* (No. 2559) and the *Donna non vidi mai* (No. 1793).

De Lucia was born in 1860. Yet the sixty or more *Gramophone & Typewriter* records which he made beginning in 1903 are, for the most part, inferior to those mentioned above, recorded when he was past fifty years old. Particularly is this true of the two renditions of *Ecco ridente in cielo* (Nos. 052078 and 052250) the latter of which was repressed here on *Victor* No. 76000, then 88602, finally 6399A. A noteworthy exception is the duet with Huguet, *Non hai compreso* from Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (No. 054082) *Victor* No. 92054, 88147 or 8050B.

About 1910, after concluding his engagement with the *Gramophone Company*, he made a few records for *Fonotipia*, most of which are Neapolitan songs. (No. 92715 is the est of the lot and represents the most sympathetic rendition on records of the *Fenesta che lucive* which is attributed to Bellini because of its similarity to a part of the *Ah non credea* in *La Sonnambula*). For any clear appraisal of De Lucia, however, a *Phonotype* record is necessary and I especially recommend the serenade, *Com' e gentil* from *Don Pasquale* (No. 2371) though the *O Amore* from *Amico Fritz* (No. 1793) holds great historical interest since he created the role at Rome in 1891. Among over two hundred records which he made for this company, there are still more which can be counted on to remain unexcelled throughout many generations of singers and audiences.

RADIO NEWS

Broadcasts from Salzburg

On Saturday, August 8, the NBC-Blue network will carry Toscanini's performance of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* from 12:05 to 12:30 p. m., EDST. The cast will be announced later.

Toscanini, conducting Beethoven's *Fidelio* with Lotte Lehmann, Anton Baumann, Alfred Jerger and Emanuel List, will be broadcast over the NBC-Red network on Sunday, August 16, from 2:30 to 3:0 p. m., EDST.

Verdi's *Falstaff*, also conducted by Toscanini, will be heard over the NBC-Red network on Thursday, August 20, from 2:05 to 2:30 p. m., EDST. Dusolina Giannini and Dino Borgioli are listed in this cast.

Felix Weingartner's performance of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the young American Metropolitan tenor, Charles Kullmann in a leading role, will be broadcast over the NBC-Red network on Tuesday, August 25, from 2:05 to 2:30 p. m., EDST.

One of the *Orchestral Serenades* performed in the Courtyard of the ancient Palace of the Prince Archbishop, directed by Bernhard Paumgartner, will be heard over the NBC-Blue network on Wednesday, August 26, from 4:05 to 4:30 p. m., EDST, will conclude the series.

RADIO A HELP TO PIANO INDUSTRY

Radio, once considered a dangerous competitor of the instrumental music industries, is now credited with being one of the fundamental factors in the recent upturn in the piano business, and statistics now offered by the music trades provide significant confirmation of repeated claims by broadcasters that radio is the most effective medium yet devised for stimulating music appreciation and promoting general music culture.

"After a careful and dispassionate study of the nearly 300 per cent increase in piano sales during the past twelve months over 1933," W. A. Memm, secretary of the National Piano Manufacturers Association, declares, "radio must now be considered one of the major reasons for this increase. Millions of listeners who might otherwise never have attained an appreciation of music, are manifesting an interest in music culture and endeavoring to become participants themselves. These converts to the musical arts are purchasing musical instruments of every description, and the piano being the basic musical instrument, has benefitted most of all from this stimulation. Radio, with its limitless possibilities, has educated listeners to appreciate music and it has produced a natural desire to create it, thus opening a hitherto non-existent market".

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The New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society will continue to broadcast its regular Sunday afternoon concerts exclusively over the Columbia Broadcasting System's coast-to-coast network for the next six seasons, according to a new contract recently negotiated on a 5-year basis. It will be in force following termination of the present agreement in the spring of 1937.

Pamphlet Binders

This is No. 1526

also carried in stock
in the following sizes

	HIGH	WIDE	THICKNESS
1525	9 inches	6 inches	½ inch
1526	9¾ "	7⅛ "	"
1527	10½ "	7⅜ "	"
1530	12 "	9⅛ "	"

Other sizes made to order

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